DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 464 032 SP 040 584

AUTHOR	Naylor, Charlie
TITLE	Reconciling Teacher Unionism's Disparate Identities: A View from the Field. BCTF Research Report.
INSTITUTION	British Columbia Teachers' Federation, Vancouver.
REPORT NO	BCTF-RR-RT02-0001
PUB DATE	2002-01-00
NOTE	20p.; Part of the BCTF Information Handbook. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the American Education Research Association (Seattle, WA, April 10-14, 2001).
AVAILABLE FROM	British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 100-550 West 6th Avenue, Vancouver, British Columbia V5Z 4P2, Canada. Tel: 800-663-9163 (Toll Free); Tel: 604-871-2283; Fax: 604-871-2294; Web site: http://www.bctf.co.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Teacher Associations; *Unions
IDENTIFIERS	Canada

ABSTRACT

While traditional debates about teacher unions have focused on their dual roles (industrial and professional), this report suggests that such duality is outdated, and it is important to recognize that teacher unions in North America now focus on a multiplicity of areas. To understand them, it is necessary to analyze the range of teacher union focuses, understand the nature and extent of teacher union focuses, and evaluate the utility of each teacher union focus. This report examines five directions that teacher unions should consider and discuss, each of which is derived from analysis of the literature. They include: teacher unions should reduce their level of engagement in reactive stances, especially with governments and the media; the professional focus on teacher unions benefits from collaboration with external groups and organizations, and this collaboration should be increased; the professional focus of teacher unions in North America has a subordinate and an acquiescent place in union structures, and this placement should be challenged and changed; teacher unions currently without a professional focus should consider one; and teacher unions should collaborate more with other teacher unions, universities, and other organizations, in professionally focused networking and publishing. (Contains 40 references.) (SM)

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BCTF Research Report

Part of the BCTF Information Handbook

SECTION XII
2002-EI-01

ED 464 032

Reconciling teacher unionism's disparate identities: A view from the field

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by Charlie Naylor
BCTF Research
January 2002

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the American Education Research Association (AERA), Seattle, April 2001.

Setting the context

Understanding teacher unions' disparate identities is possible through a consideration of contexts in which unions operate, analysis of the literature on teacher unions, and an understanding of the dynamics within teacher unions. Teacher unions in the English-speaking western democracies have a variety of structures and priorities, and operate in a range of educational, cultural, economic, social, political, and geographic contexts. However, within these diverse contexts, most have faced similar challenges to their structures and roles. Educational challenges include increasingly diverse student populations, higher expectations that schools deal with societal issues, and more accountability to government, with implicit or explicit demands on teachers in all these areas. Many urban environments have become more racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse and schools more inclusive of students with a wide range of special needs. Politically, most Anglophone societies have experienced periods of either national or state/provincial conservatism, which have in many cases reduced resources allocated to educational systems while arguably increasing what is expected of them.

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RT02-0001
January 2002

B.C. Teachers' Federation, 100 – 550 West 6th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V5Z 4P2
604-871-2283 • 1-800-663-9163 • Fax 604-871-2294 • www.bctf.ca

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Many teacher unions view the actions of many federal and state/provincial governments in the last 25 years as ideologically inspired, and hostile or challenging to their members' interests. Conversely, some governments would argue that teacher unions are ideologically inspired and hostile to necessary reforms. Whatever the perspective, animosity between teacher unions and conservative but reforming governments has become more the norm than the exception. Government actions have inspired a significant increase in political activity by teacher unions, and this political activity is not limited to union reactions to government initiatives. It includes, as well, a more general opposition to neo-conservative ideologies and globalization, and an increased focus on "social justice" issues. Social justice activity counters what has been described as teacher unions' traditionally reactive political stance (Poole, 1998). In the area of social justice, unions have initiated action on issues as divergent as race and homophobia, in turn causing reaction by conservative groups, and, to a lesser extent, governments. Teacher unions' disparate identities have therefore evolved in response to diverse challenges — challenges reflecting both needs within the education system (diversity), and external pressures (accountability).

While teacher unions for many years have attempted to balance their industrial and professional goals (that is, the well-being of their members, including salary and working conditions, and improvements to teaching intended to improve student learning), the emergence and durability of political action and the emergence of a social justice focus now mean that teacher unions have multiple balances to consider. What is the appropriate balance between the industrial, professional, and political focuses and actions of teacher unions? Should they also engage in social justice issues? Should all these areas of focus be sustained, and if so, in what proportion and priority? Or should teacher unions reconsider their priorities, reduce/expand their range of focus, and change their structures accordingly?

Most North American teacher unions state dual focuses: the traditional industrial union goals, and professional improvement goals. However, even authors generally considered sympathetic to teacher unions have expressed criticism of their structures and practices. Weiner (1999, p. 47) argues that "many teachers view the union as irrelevant to their teaching and pay little attention to its affairs." In addition to feeling the disdain of some of their own members, teacher unions have been under attack by governments which promote "market values" and identify teacher unions as impediments to effective educational change (Dinham & Scott, 2000). From the perspective of many teacher unions, the market views of various governments have generally been supported by an array of conservative media, and by authors such as Haar (1998), who states that "teacher unions are formidable foes of meaningful educational reform."

Kerchner and Koppich (1993) argue that industrial unionism is dysfunctional, and that teachers should engage in "professional unionism," with a goal of improving education quality. They argue that this requires putting aside the old, industrial form of unionism. In a later paper, Kerchner, Koppich and Weeres (1998) argue that some teacher unions are reinventing themselves, that some segments of teacher unions have a strong focus on professional issues and on the improvement of education for children, rather than on what are perceived to be the vested interests of teachers. Examples of "new unionism," such as that in Rochester, which is part of the Teacher Union Reform Network (TURN), are also described by Urbanski (1998). Other authors generally considered more sympathetic to teacher unions have stated that "teacher unions in Canada and in the United States have acquired reputations as militant, unco-operative, resistant to change, and contributing to the de-skilling of teachers" (Poole, 1997). The "rebirth" of some

teacher unions has been viewed with considerable skepticism from outside unions, and in some instances by overt hostility within union ranks (Lowe & Fuller, 1998).

However, one area of the literature which examines teacher unions offers two very different perspectives on what educational effects teacher unions have had as industrial unions, either through bargaining processes or through their political actions. The first perspective, critical of teacher unions, argues that teacher unions inflate the cost of education (Kurth, 1987), oppose parents and community (Hoxby, 1996), and unduly influence legislators proposing educational reform (Emberts & Stone, 1984). The second argues that by achieving better wages and working conditions (such as preparation time, reduced teaching loads, and smaller class sizes) through bargaining, both teachers and students benefit, and productivity is boosted by improved teacher satisfaction (Rowan, Chainag & Miller; 1997, Pfeffer & Davis-Blake, 1990).

There has also been lively debate on whether the involvement and actions of teacher unions is associated positively (Eberts & Stone, 1987; Argys & Rees, 1995; Kleiner & Petree, 1988) or negatively (Hoxby, 1996; Kurth, 1987) with student achievement. The recent work of Steelman, Powell & Carini (2000) reviews these perspectives, and critiques the limits of existing research linking teacher unions and student achievement, in particular the lack of adjustment for student selectivity in many earlier studies. Their conclusion, having made such adjustment, is unequivocal: students score higher where teachers are unionized:

> We find a statistically significant and positive relationship between state and teacher unionization rates and state standardized test scores, after controlling for potential confounding factors. In other words, our study reveals that if we take into account compositional factors (e.g., the percentage of students taking the exam), then states with greater percentage of teachers in unions tend to report higher test performance of their students. This pattern is surprisingly robust; it holds for both SAT [Scholastic Assessment Test] and ACT [American College Test] scores and persists across different model specifications. Although social scientists have disagreed over which measure of teacher unionization is preferable, this pattern remains, regardless of the measure chosen. In no model is the effect of teacher unions negative (pp. 456–457).

The work of Steelman et al provides evidence that a teacher union's industrial focus has a clear connection to professional issues, and that collective agreements bring benefits to students' learning as well as improved conditions for teachers. This provides a strong justification for teacher unions to maintain their attention on key working conditions through a focus on bargaining.

The professional focus of teacher unions has been a North American phenomenon for at least a century, and was described in a speech by Margaret Haley in 1904 (Weiner, 1992). The Canadian historical context and evolution was described by Smaller (1998), who suggested that a professional focus has continued uninterrupted, in spite of dramatic changes in social and educational contexts, and in relationships between organizations within the educational system. While these historical reviews correctly state the continued existence of the union's professional focus, there has been little consideration in the literature of its nature or its status compared to the focus on industrial issues. Nor do any evaluations appear to have taken place — it is clear from

the literature that the focus exists, but how "sharp" is this focus, in the view of elected union officers and members of the teacher unions?

"Social justice unionism" is a more recent phenomenon, and was defined by Peterson (1999) in the following terms:

> Social justice unionism views itself as part of a broader movement for social progress rather than merely focused on narrow self-interest. It calls for participatory union membership, education reform to serve all children, collaboration with community organizations, and a concern for broader issues of equity.

This definition widens the perspective, and stresses engaging members in union activities. It also orientates teacher unions to focus outwards, to include community and world issues where inequity is seen to exist — to include the needs of children and society rather than limit focus only to members' needs, which some perceive as selfish and self-interested. Social justice unionism says that social issues such as race, class, gender, poverty, inequality, homophobia, and globalization are all union issues, and deserve union attention.

Differences in the use of language reflect widely differing stances among those who write about teacher unions, and it is instructive to consider how language is used as a part of our examination of the literature on teacher unions. The most emotive language seems to emerge from the most hostile critics. However, emotive language would appear to be counter-productive, as the potential effectiveness of a case is reduced when the argument appears to be more ideologically driven than based on a constructed and logical foundation.

The language used by academics who write about teacher unions generally ranges from the emotive to the neutral. Lieberman's (1997) book title[1] could hardly contain more vitriol directed at teacher unions. His use of words such as "sabotage" and "hostage" reflect more emotion and ideology than reason. While considerably more temperate, as befits a Canadian author, Lawton (1999) also appears hostile to teacher unions. His research on teacher unions was funded by the Donner Foundation, an organization increasingly funding right-wing views, and described by Walkom (1997) as "paymaster to the right, a source of ready cash for the favourite causes of the new, market conservatism."

Lawton argues that Canadian teacher unions have become "combative opponents that confront representatives of government," contesting not only "school" issues, but also governments' neo-conservative agendas. Many teacher unions would agree with Lawton's description, but would disagree with his analysis that unions should not engage in such activities. They might also take issue with terms such as "combative" and "confront," words he uses to label only the unions as aggressive — the "representatives of governments" to which the unions are responding are described in far more neutral terms. Lawton (2000) also suggests that provincial governments "prod" teacher unions, an emotive term that many equate with shifting recalcitrant cattle, though Lawton does not expressly state any bovine metaphors. Bascia (1998), generally more

[1] *The teacher unions: How the NEA and AFT sabotage reform and hold students, parents, teachers, and taxpayers hostage to bureaucracy*

sympathetic to unions but using neutral language, describes the same events as Lawton, but states:

> The political and economic contexts in which they [teacher unions] operate are volatile and frequently unsupportive. With educational funding uncertain and teachers' legal rights to participation in decision-making minimal, unions must continually focus their efforts on securing educational resources and minimizing the damage of policies crafted by those with more legal authority and whose priorities for schooling diverge from those of teachers.

The literature on teacher unions, therefore, reflects a continuum of approaches to union reform, from overt hostility to mild critiques intended to redirect their focus. The more hostile the author, the more likely the conclusion that governments should take initiatives to disempower teacher unions; the milder critiques offer analyses, from which unions might take ideas to adapt and change their structures and priorities. Some studies call for a mixture of imposed "reform," through changing labour laws with the aim of ending "closed shop" arrangements (Lawton, 2000), and internal changes, which for some (Peterson & Charney, 1999) means promoting "social justice unionism." Others (Rodrigue, 2000) stress a stronger focus on increasing member participation in organizational and professional leadership activities. Lieberman (1997) is arguably the most overtly and explicitly hostile critic of teacher unions, although many unions would consider the removal of "closed shop" regulations (as suggested by Lawton) to constitute a direct threat to their effectiveness, if not their survival.

Other analyses are more benign, perhaps exemplified by academic authors such as Poole (2000) and Bascia (1999), who appear challenging conceptually but who focus on articulating ideas which extend or adapt union capacity and parameters. Indeed, it is often the presence or absence of conceptual frameworks that differentiates the two general perspectives in the literature on teacher unions. It appears that the authors with the most creative and constructive ideas for envisioning the future work of teacher unions often include conceptual frameworks in their writing, while those whose aim appears to be the destruction of teacher unions have no such frameworks. The scaffolding of a conceptual frame may be necessary to be constructive, while demolition can be achieved with less complex, more emotive expression.

Internal pressures for reform have predominantly focused on promoting either professional issues (Kerchner, 1993, 1998) or social justice (Peterson & Charney, 1999) as priorities for the work of teacher unions.

Examination of the literature on teacher unions and their roles and future provides us with the opportunity to improve our understanding of their educational and societal contexts, their evolution, and the authors' stances. While the evolution of teacher unions in changing economic, social, and political environments may share some descriptive commonalities in the literature, the analyses of both unions and their environments diverge widely. If we understand more from accessing the literature we need also to consider who is writing it. Or, more importantly, who is not. Primarily, the authorship is academic, external to unions; only a few critiques are presented by members or officers of unions.

The limited engagement of teacher unionists in the literature about teacher unions is problematic; their absence from the debate implies that it is not considered to affect the business of unions.

This absence could prove costly in the coming years, as the changing demographics of teaching mean a newer and younger teaching population, with arguably less allegiance to current union structures and priorities (Naylor, 1997; Rodrigue, 2000). In the next section I will argue that teacher unions need to engage in the current debate, and also to consider how to engage new, and generally younger, cohorts of teachers in union activities.

Examination of the dominant and/or conflicting goals of teacher unions appears to be common throughout most of the teacher union literature. Is the teacher union's purpose primarily one of promoting and protecting members' (self-)interests, and all other actions should be subordinate to these interests? Or is it necessary to include and balance additional priorities and roles? If so, which ones? Some argue that a professional focus should be at the forefront, while others press for social justice issues to have a higher priority. Many with a traditional, industrial view of teacher unions ignore both, and focus on the traditional union "meat and potatoes," bargaining. There appears to be at least a duality, and probably a multiplicity, of focuses, and likely even paradoxes between or among the stated and argued purposes of teacher unions. The term "duality" implies "either/or," while "multiplicity" reflects the possibility that more than two options may be competing for dominance within a union's focuses. Historically, analyses have focused on duality, or even dichotomy (i.e., bargaining/industrial, and professional roles); a more current focus would encompass multiplicity (i.e., political involvement and social justice activities, in addition to bargaining and professional roles).

Disparate teacher-union focuses may be paradoxical, but need the paradoxical be problematic for an organization? Poole (2000) has described Ford & Backoff's (1988) three perspectives on the construction of paradox in organizations: formal logic, dialectic, and trialectic. This framework facilitates reflection on whether teacher unions have constructed paradox as part of their thinking and culture, and if such paradox reflects a duality, dichotomy, or multiplicity of focus. The three are:

i. a formal logic perspective

Within formal logic, paradox is viewed as dichotomous, or at opposite ends of a continuum; resolution of the paradox is achieved by selecting only one choice (if dichotomous), or by compromising (if on a continuum). Either way, the resolution is static, with a fixed degree of inclusion for each focus. Poole sees the formal logic approach as problematic for teacher unions, as they often need to respond quickly to rapidly changing environments; formal logic approach reduces the chance of this being possible.

ii. a dialectic perspective

In the dialectic perspective, paradoxical dualities are viewed as "dynamic interdependent forces that oppose one another," each building within the organization until they can no longer be sustained, and then new and different perspectives emerging from the old. If the dialectic were the norm in a teacher union, the old organizational norms and focuses might evolve into new and different sets of priorities and approaches.

iii. a trialectic perspective

Within the trialectic perspective, what appears to be paradoxical may complement rather than contradict. Such a perspective leads to a dynamic balance, with dualities

co-existing within cycles. In this perspective, a union supports both teachers' self-interests and a wider focus on educational improvement. Poole suggests that various paradoxical cycles are the norm for many organizations, with movement between dimensions within cycles, and movement between cycles, as an organization seeks to maintain some form of equilibrium.

For teacher unions, therefore, paradox need not be problematic, but it does need to be recognized and understood. If recognized and understood, it has considerable utility in explaining multiple focuses and their cyclical nature — the periodic shifts in priorities, staffing, and funding allocations. During a bargaining period, for example, a greater proportion of resources are naturally allocated to support the bargaining process, while in non-bargaining years, more resources are allocated to professional issues or social justice priorities.

While the traditional debate has focused on the dual roles of teacher unions (industrial and professional), I would argue that this duality is now outdated. We need to recognize that teacher unions in North America now focus on a multiplicity of areas, and to understand them we need to:

- analyze the range of teacher union focuses (which areas are included in union activities?);
- understand the nature and extent of teacher union focuses (how far does a union proceed in political action, or to promote social justice? what do these actions look like?);
- evaluate the utility of each teacher union focus (what are the views of those who work within unions, and those who are members of unions?).

These analyses are needed both within the literature and internally, within unions. From my review of the literature it appears that there are examples of studies which consider the range, nature, and extent of teacher union focuses, but few which evaluate their utility or effectiveness, stating explicit criteria. Academic explorations could provide ongoing descriptions and analyses of the range and extent of the multiple and evolving priorities of teacher unions. This in turn could support teacher unions' engagement in assessing utility through reflection and dialogue with members, leading to adaptation of programs and priorities.

If this is what we know, where should we go?

The following section represents an effort to articulate five directions that might be considered and discussed by teacher unions. Each direction is derived from analysis of the literature, but there is also a potentially significant perspective generated from being active in teacher union affairs as a member, an elected officer, or an employee. This is more difficult to articulate or explain. Perhaps one of the tasks for those of us who work in unions, or are union members, is to combine analysis based on literature and on our experience. This experience includes our understanding of the dynamics within our unions, an area where few academic authors have knowledge or insight. To do this, we need to define our experience more clearly, perhaps through a systematic reflection and inquiry into our work and roles. This paper only includes the author's perspective as one individual employed by a teacher union. While this perspective may not match those of many active members or elected officials, it at least introduces the concept of

looking at unions in ways that include a consideration of their internal political and organizational dynamics.

Exploration of the five directions listed below is intended to support reflection on the range, nature, extent, and utility of current and potential union focuses. I will argue that the time is right for a radical review of the professional focus of teacher unions, and that this focus should not only be expanded but qualitatively changed. I will also argue for a multiplicity of focuses, which includes industrial as well as professionally-focused and social-justice unionism.

Essentially, the strategy proposed here involves replacing the traditional "shotgun" approach to the various teacher union activities (wherein everything's hit but nothing's covered) with a more targeted, cohesive, and productive approach, which may limit the range but improve the quality of teacher union involvement and effectiveness.

As a starting point for discussion, I would propose the following five directions.

1. Teacher unions should reduce their level of engagement in reactive stances, especially with governments and the media.
2. The professional focus of teacher unions benefits from collaboration with external groups and organizations, and this collaboration should be increased.
3. The professional focus of teacher unions in North America has a subordinate and an acquiescent place in union structures, and this placement should be challenged and changed.
4. Teacher unions currently without a professional focus should consider developing one.
5. Teacher unions should collaborate more with other teacher unions, universities, and other organizations, in professionally-focused networking and publishing.

1. Teacher unions should reduce their level of engagement in reactive stances, especially with governments and the media.

Teacher union involvement in political issues has varied in degree, and over time and geography. Overt political endorsements of democratic U.S. presidential candidates are routinely made by American teacher unions. The stakes were high for the Australian Education Union (AEU) when it campaigned for the Labour government in the 1993 and 1996 elections (Spaull,1998), especially when the focus did not resonate with the general public opinion. The risks inherent in any political campaign are potentially more damaging to a union which does not have professional and/or social-justice focuses in its mandate — its actions are more likely to be interpreted as self-serving, rather than motivated by concerns about larger social issues.

A teacher union with a single, industrial focus is more closely identified with members' self-interest than is a dual/multiple-focus union which engages in dialogue and collaborations with school districts, parents, and other groups or organizations in the educational system. A dual focus is a wider focus, expanding from what is perceived to be teacher self-interest to include a focus on the profession, and how the profession helps students learn. Social justice unionism spreads the focus even wider, to include those societal issues which, if not addressed, mean that students' needs cannot be met. The government which defeats an industrial union by implementing a political initiative is often politically popular, especially in cases such as those note by Spaull, where the union position appears out of step with public opinion. But such

scenarios can be different when the union has dual or multiple focuses. Commitment to professional focuses shifts attention away from what are perceived to be teachers' self-interests, and on to what is necessary to provide educational services which meets students' needs. Countering government initiatives from this perspective therefore addresses not only students' needs but, in some cases, the preferences of parents and community. Defeats for a professionally-focused union in conflict with government, while still unfortunate, are also potentially damaging electorally for that government if the consequences of its initiative are later considered to be negative for students, parents, and community.

Teacher unions do not always lose political campaigns. Some teacher unions have shown considerable resilience and skill in such campaigns, usually when there is a focus on a concept which most would see as educational. Examples include the recent defeat of voucher initiatives in California and Michigan, and campaigns for increased funding for public education in Arizona, Washington, and California. These campaigns were discussed by Archer (2000), who also quoted a compliment regarding union tactics from an ideological opponent, Amy Kaufmann, of the conservative Hudson Institute. She stated that, in terms of the 2000 U.S. federal election:

> I think unions overall did not have a good day, but I think the NEA and AFT were very successful in their efforts. And that's because the education unions concentrated directly on what affected them. They had clear goals as to what they needed, and they put what money and resources they had into those races.

In an earlier paper (Naylor, 1997), I argued that teacher unions are so predictably reactive that their positions can be factored in to educational change initiatives by education ministries and governments. Avoiding predictable union reaction, therefore, would focus attention much more clearly on the government initiative, rather than on the union's reaction to it. Arguably, if community and media scrutiny were directed to the government initiatives instead of to competing ideologies, government accountability would increase.

It is also worth considering avoiding reactive stances with media. Dolmage (1999) argued that the media systematically and deliberately distort information about the issue of violence in schools, for example, portraying schools as unsafe places:

> The "legitimate" commercial media have regularly distorted facts relating to criminal activity in general, youth crime in particular, and, even more particularly, youth crime as it relates to the safety of children in public schools.... These distortions may be represented conceptually on a continuum which ranges in severity from layout manipulation and deliberately-misleading headlines, to a bias in favour of reporting and emphasizing only the most damning statistics, to deliberate misrepresentation of the facts, to a systemic focusing on stories of the most violent and sensational nature.

Dolmage's perspective is that the media deliberately misrepresent and manipulate information about schools and what happens in them. While the media's intent may be merely to sensationalize, it could also be argued that they have an ideological position which neither favours public institutions, nor has much sympathy or respect for the individuals who work in them. Others would argue that while teachers may be portrayed with some empathy at times, their unions are rarely afforded such "generosity." One way to reduce media's capacity to

manipulate union reaction is to not react, and to channel media access to teacher union leaders at times and in ways that are decided by the union, not by the media.

It may be useful to question whether unions' constant reactions are worth the energy they consume, and whether they are even effective. If unions react, campaign, and lose, then wait for the next issue, and repeat the familiar cycle, one might ask why they still bother, knowing the likely outcome. If unions are always portrayed negatively by the media, why do they keep offering themselves up to the media? Of course, this is a simplistic argument, and earlier I provided evidence (regarding voucher schools) that some union campaigns have been positive, productive, and successful in challenging problematic proposals. Similarly, some union leaders have made positive media impacts. Even with these exceptions, however, just because unions have always reacted does not mean they always should, nor that they should react in stereotypical and predictable ways. Some years ago, many office workers might say that they had always used typewriters and carbon paper in their job. And so they did, but do they now? Teacher unions need to think "outside the box," to move away from reactive positions and start setting more of their own agendas and developing better strategies for dealing with the media. One way to accomplish this is to disengage from reactive positions, or at least to change the frequency and strategy of their reactions.

One approach could be for teacher unions to selectively reduce their perennially and predictably reactive engagements with governments. Selective disengagement means that teacher unions would react to fewer government initiatives and actions, and reduce the resources and personnel devoted to campaigns and to the many more mundane processes introduced by governments that consume union staff's time and union resources. This would require strategic decision-making, and members' support for the shift in operations and focus.

Disengagement does not mean that teacher unions become either timid or introspective, however, but that they make their challenges in different ways, perhaps developing alliances that add other voices to their own when expressing concerns or stating opposition. An inquiry approach (Naylor, 1997), engaging members and others in a detailed exploration and critique of issues, could also be effective. Then, instead of a challenge being seen merely as the expected "doctrinaire reaction," there is a better chance that more will agree that unions' input is of substance in the debate, and it can be less easily dismissed.

Such a significant shift, however, does not take into account the internal dynamics of unions. While ostensibly democratic, most teacher unions are run by activists who were elected by activists rather than by the general teacher membership. Some union activists, especially those who've experienced many strikes and struggles, may support a strongly reactive approach, and are positioned to take actions to remove from office others who do not share their ideas about effective strategies. To move away from a reactive mentality, therefore, is not just a conceptual adaptation, but a cultural shift within the union, and such a change in direction would require internal consensus.

2. The professional focus of teacher unions benefits from collaboration with external groups and organizations, and this collaboration should be increased.

Collaborative efforts between teacher unions and districts are becoming more common in Canada (Coulter, 2000) and in the U.S. (Stedman & Stroot, 1998). These collaborations build partnerships across organizations, thereby building support for union participation from management and administration. They also involve teachers in union professional activities, building support and respect for the union through such engagement, and develop the capacity of unions to engage professionally, which by its nature builds status and increases the chances of a union's health and survival.

The Research Department of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) in Vancouver, Canada, is involved in a range of collaborations. One of the joint projects, a four-way collaboration, involves the central union office, three local teachers' associations, three school districts, and university faculty. This project, which receives funding from the Canadian government's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), supports teacher research groups in three school districts. In each, the local teachers' association and district management agreed on a theme for their district's research group. This theme-selection process encouraged a professionally-focused dialogue between union and management.

Another joint project engaged in research on "grey area" students — students often in alternate programs, but not officially considered to have special needs. In this project, union research staff and university faculty facilitated the local teacher research groups, while the school district provided release time (one half-day each month). In some locations, the local teachers' association provided meeting space, and ample supplies of jelly beans. Teachers and facilitators are starting to write and publish, and to present together at conferences such as the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the Canadian Society for Studies in Education (CSSE). But, and more importantly, they are engaged together in inquiry and dialogue, questioning whether their research improves student learning, and trying to better understand and articulate the nature of good teaching.

A third district/union group addressed literacy issues in elementary schools. BCTF Research staff worked with teachers and parents, exploring ways to facilitate parents' participation in supporting their children's early literacy. One product of this collaboration was a joint 120-page publication, "Exploring Literacy,"[2] which combines analysis of international research with local literacy programs developed by teachers and parents. The publication describes strategies for both teachers and parents to collaborate in supporting early literacy. Issues which are potentially problematic to teacher unions, such as the role of volunteers in schools, are addressed in the inquiry by asking parents to offer advice and reflections on their volunteer experiences; these experiences were reported in the publication. In this way, the union expressed a willingness to listen to parents, and to reflect their views in a union publication, rather than dictating rules and boundaries. One should not be naïve about such issues — on occasion disputes and problems can arise — but through professional inquiry and collaboration, some difficult issues can also be addressed and defused.

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[2] Available for $15.00 (Cdn) from BCTF Lesson Aids Service, 100 – 550 West 6th Avenue, Vancouver, BC, Canada V5Z 4P2. Tel: 604-871-2181, or e-mail sdrummond@bctf.ca .

A professional focus is a feature of other associations such as those of doctors, dentists, accountants, and other professionals who enjoy high public esteem. Giving a higher profile and priority to developing and promoting professional development opportunities for teachers would ensure a sustainable role and function for teacher unions, and possibly enable the teaching profession and teachers' organizations to be viewed more positively than they currently are.

3. The professional focus of teacher unions in North America has a subordinate and acquiescent place in union structures, and this placement should be challenged and changed.

Urbanski (1998), argues that teacher unions which do not become agents of reform are likely to become targets of reform. Having a professional focus enables a teacher union to be an agent of reform, because it engages in dialogue and reflection on areas such as pedagogy, school organization, and educational change. But the argument is often stated as a dilemma — unions are either industrial or professional. However, applying the "construction of paradox" frame developed by Ford & Backoff (1988) described earlier in this paper enables unions to shift away from "either/or" thinking to greater acceptance of duality or multiplicity. In such a frame, teacher unions' varied focuses can coexist, rather than be either dominant or subordinate.

I would argue that even where a dual focus exists within a teacher union, the status of the professional or social justice arms is often low, and both are frequently subordinate to, rather than equal to, the bargaining focus. Although there is limited direct evidence to support this argument, as many North American unions employ staff and create departments to reflect dual or multiple focuses, indirect indicators may tell the story of lesser status — factions, funding, and whether innovation is encouraged. One possible indicator of lesser status for these focuses may be the existence of "breakaway" factions, where union activists set up a structure outside the established union structure, focusing perhaps on gender or race issues. Members of these factions may make the case that while the union has an official focus on gender or race, they view it as token, patronizing, and ranked subordinate to meeting the organization's own needs rather than those of the oppressed in society. A second indicator is budgetary. Simply to have a dual or multiple focus is not the same as equivalent funding for the professional/social justice areas and bargaining or political campaigns. A third indicator is how many innovative people and projects are union people and projects. In terms of union dynamics, providing equity in funding will have little effect in promoting professional or social justice issues in teacher unions unless hiring and operational practices are changed to allow for greater innovation in designing professionally-focussed and social justice projects, and in hiring staff who will extend union thinking and approaches.

Thus the necessary change is not just in terms of resources, but also in terms of changing operational practices by bringing more "cutting edge" teachers in to teacher unions as professional developers or as promoters of social justice, rather than staffing union positions based predominantly on union affiliation and loyalty. Such change potentially shifts the staffing processes away from entry into a comfortable but possibly myopic club, towards more openly competitive hiring processes, where a more diverse range of staff members brings a wider range of skills into union programs, structures, and processes. It would also bring challenges to the political or executive arms of teacher unions, as new and innovative personnel, ideas, and programs challenge the status quo, in a form of what could be termed "positive provocation."

This provocation should benefit teacher unions by creatively challenging from the inside, thereby improving quality and utility in the "products" of professional or social justice focuses such as workshops and publications.

Ideally, a positive but creative tension could and should exist between the different focuses of teacher unions, with increased intellectual debate within the union replacing a non-intellectual approach which arguably dominates many current union structures and much union thinking. If teacher unions want to define themselves, and be seen as, unions of professionals to members and others, they need to revitalize and reconstruct their professional focus, including activities such as intellectual discussion and publication, so that they reflect the professional nature of teaching rather than reflecting non-dialectic, static, and stale organizations.

4. Teacher unions currently without a professional focus should consider developing one.

This paper has primarily considered teacher unions in Canada and the United States, with a very limited consideration of those in Australia, New Zealand, and the UK. While having a professional focus is a norm within North American teacher unions, searches of the literature and the world-wide web suggest that such a focus is not common in other countries. The intent in this section of the paper is not to lecture those unions with a dominant industrial focus but to consider whether the evolution of North American teacher unions has any relevance for them.

A number of Australian teacher unionists are interested in developing and incorporating a professional-union approach into their union structures. They have visited North America and explored the approaches of unions here, but there appears to be little indication of acceptance of such a focus developing within their union structures. Australian teacher unions, therefore, still appear to be strongly industrial, reflecting neither a professional nor a social justice focus. In the UK, the National Union of Teachers' (NUT) indicates a clear focus on professional issues on their web site; a succinct articulation of the NUT's rationale can be found in the (2000) first national leadership Convention: "By being a provider of high quality professional development, the NUT would enhance its standing in the profession and beyond it."

In considering developing a professional focus, it is also worth stating why such a focus has merit for teacher unions. The capacity of teacher unions to engage in professional improvement areas such as mentoring, teacher research, and professional development is well proven. "How" is not the issue, but the "why" needs to be stated as follows. Without a professional focus, teacher unions can be marginalized within their own membership, within policy debates, and by governments who wish to curtail union power. Industrial/political agendas are frequently confrontational, while professional agendas have much greater potential to be collaborative. The industrial and political agendas usually involve reactive stances from teacher unions, while a professional focus involves a pro-active approach. Pro-actively supporting the professional work of teachers is an appropriate union role, and empowering for teachers: it engages many members for whom the political and industrial approaches do not resonate, but who still pay union dues. It is based on these considerations that I would argue that a professional focus might be seriously considered by those teacher unions with a predominantly industrial focus.

5. Teacher unions should collaborate more with other teacher unions, universities, and other organizations, in professionally-focused networking and publishing.

Hendricks-Lee & Mooney (1998) argue for internal coherence, collaboration, and competence within a teacher union in developing a professionally-oriented approach:

> In order to engage in systematic education reform, an organization must first become a system (a healthy purposeful system), interact more with other educational systems, and learn and develop on the basis of those interactions. Phrased in language more suitable for organizational change, the necessary components for systemic reform are developing internal coherence, making larger connections, and developing competence.

There has been some focus in the literature on collaboration involving teacher unions. However, most of this exploration has been on unions collaborating with non-union partners, and little attention has been paid to the possibility of collaborations between or among unions. Collaboration among university faculty to develop projects is a norm, because collaborative research and writing enables university faculty to clarify concepts and to publish reports which explore and explain concepts and practices. Collaborations between teacher unions could have similar benefits. A wide range of possible collaborations could be explored and expanded, involving two or more unions, unions and school districts, or unions and university faculty. Such collaborations would enrich design, delivery, and credibility of networks and would enable more resources to flow to collaborative research projects and to union publications as external funding is acquired.

External resources, including research grants from external sources such as the SSHRC in Canada, could be accessed by teacher unions for professional inquiry, especially for projects in partnership with universities. Though Canadian teacher unions have been slow to access such funds, this might be remedied by acquiring external funding for one inquiry project per union in a given year. Without external collaborative partners, these funds are harder to access. Teacher unions should therefore develop more partnerships with university faculty to secure external funding, and consider allocating more internal funding to joint union professional/social justice research and projects. Alternatively, teacher unions might emulate the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation's approach (1996) to supporting professional inquiry through their foundation to support teacher research.

In Canada, union staffs and elected officers from the affiliated provincial unions meet routinely, but there is minimal collaboration between teacher union staff to design and initiate inquiry projects and to report on findings from such projects that are of professional interest to teachers. Teacher unions have rich human resources in their membership which could engage in inquiry-oriented collaborations.

Inquiry-oriented, professionally-focused, or social-justice-focused networking and collaboration might therefore be inter-union or involve external partners, but all would provide process and product benefits to individuals (teachers and others) and to teacher unions as organizations. In terms of process, participating in collaborative inquiry enriches teachers' professional experience, offering a rich form of professional development. In terms of product, much more

union-sponsored research could be presented at educational conferences, and published, particularly on the world wide web. Presentation and publication not only raise unions' profiles, but bring increased respect to unions as their members and representatives engage, and are seen to engage, in an inquiry-based approach to resolving issues. This approach would be less didactic, and therefore possibly more-readily acceptable, because the inquirer (the union) explores rather than proclaims, potentially involves others in the exploration, and shares the journey through publishing. Products (reports and presentations) of inquiry projects can then add to professional discourse and understanding.

Benefits from this approach accrue to the union internally, as members see the union engaging in professional discourse, and they have opportunities to access more union-sponsored research. It accrues externally, too, as other education stakeholders see different dimensions to the union's focus and activities. However, not all the stakeholders who interact with teacher unions would welcome a shift to a greater union professional focus, because of the ways this would add to the union's credibility and effectiveness. Some would rather deal with the familiar, predictable, reactive industrial union, so that mandated educational change would rarely be challenged by the union on professional grounds, or by linkage to wider societal issues through the social justice approach.

Rodrigue (2000) expresses a view of collaboration in her discussion of extending communities, and links collaborative ventures to rethinking reactive stances and changing strategies:

> Teacher unions must recognize their interdependence in relation to other interested education partners by offering expertise, partnering initiatives, and lobbying to expand learning opportunities for students.... In their role as social activists, unions should be engaged in the third dimension of power as defined by Lukes (1974) influencing the public on what they should demand from government. This does not entail defeating governments but instead involves helping the public articulate expectations of government.

Conclusion

Analysis of the literature on teacher unions can be productive for unions interested in reflecting on the nature of "disparate identity," or understanding the diverse roles teacher unions now encompass. The literature provides both conceptual frameworks and analyses, which allow us to consider the nature of what is disparate in our organizations. It helps us to distinguish between those writers who have launched thinly-disguised and ideologically-influenced attacks on teacher unions, and who wish to destroy them, from those who constructively critique teacher unions and offer suggestions for future focuses and directions. Most of these authors, whether hostile, constructively critical, or empathetic, are not members of teacher unions, nor are they employed by them. While we as unionists have much to learn from them, and while we should engage in dialogue with them, we teacher union members and staff might provide our own analyses and articulate our preferred directions. We can only do that if we explore ideas and share them within and between our unions.

There is a need for debate within and across teacher unions about the identities and roles of our unions. There is ample room within such debate for those academics whose work allows us greater understanding. Such a debate should engage new and veteran members within union membership and lead to experiments in the expansion of professional and social justice activities, with the intent of building a purposeful evolution of the unions. Without such purposeful evolution, teacher unions, especially those with a narrow industrial focus, are far more likely to face a less-welcome evolution — one not of their own making.

This paper does not argue for the abandonment of the industrial models of teacher unionism, but rather suggests a strengthening of the professional and social justice focuses. It does not propose that unions not counter actions they consider to be not in the best interests of their members or of students, but that unions select their issues, set their own agendas, and make their challenges in different ways. Such a shift implies the need for reconsidering what is claimed to be the professional nature and role of a teacher union. It also implies the need for reviewing internal structures, staffing less conservatively, collaborating more widely with non-union organizations, and networking more effectively with other unions. An understanding of the literature, and an application of selected organizational change theory, may assist teacher unions to develop appropriate structures and programs which will enable our unions to become more effective, more responsive, and more respected.

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